

Staging a Comeback
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New York, New York!



The *Road Less Traveled* Artistic Team at our first workshop in New York City this past April. Front row from left to right: Reza Mirsajadi, Nandita Shenoy, Adam Ashraf Elsayigh, and Lyra Nalan. Back row from left to right: John Clinton Eisner, Jamil Khoury, Mathew Park (actor), Lanxing Fu (actor), and Malik Gillani.

We're thrilled to share that after a very long pause, Silk Road Rising is returning to live theatre!

Our *Road Less Traveled* project, conceived by Jamil Khoury, is an evolving live theatre piece that explores multiple interpretations of Robert Frost's iconic poem, "The Road Not Taken" (1915), through the eyes of first and second-generation immigrant theatre artists. The poem represents a fascinating bridge between Frost's America of the early 20th century and the realities facing today's New Americans.

Silk Road Rising has cultivated an extraordinary cohort of theatre artists to participate in this project. Following a series of dynamic virtual meetings, we held our first in-person workshop (April 28-30) in New York City with the support of our partners at Peacedale Global Arts. During our three days together, new material was shared, reworked, and brought to life.

We plan to produce the World Premiere of *Road Less Traveled* in Chicago in 2025 and look forward to keeping you updated as this very exciting project unfolds.

And of course, our other live theatre work-in-progress, *The Art of Aphasia*, continues to evolve. Stay tuned for more information on that front.

***Road Less Traveled* Artistic Team**

Jamil Khoury, Conceiver/Producer

Malik Gillani, Producer

Adam Ashraf Elsayigh, Playwright

Lyra Nalan, Playwright

Nandita Shenoy, Playwright

Reza Mirsajadi, Deviser

John Clinton Eisner, President, Peacedale Global Arts

Megan McClain, Artistic Director, Peacedale Global Arts



Lyra Nalan (left) and Nandita Shenoy (right)



Reza Mirsajadi (left) and John Clinton Eisner (right)



Megan McClain (left) and Adam Ashraf Elsayigh (right)

Remembering a Tour de Force

In 2008, we produced the Midwest Premiere of Philip Kan Gotanda's *Yohen*. This exquisite play tells the story of a divorced Japanese woman and an African American GI who met in post-World War II Japan and fell in love. After decades of struggle, they found an accepting Los Angeles suburb to call home—until their peaceful world started collapsing around them.



Cheryl Hamada (left) and Ernest Perry Jr. (right) in Silk Road Rising's 2008 Midwest Premiere of Philip Kan Gotanda's *Yohen*, directed by Steve Scott, and presented in association with Goodman Theatre.

More than a study of clashing cultures, *Yohen* was the poetic, resonant story of two partners who discovered that intimate relationships change with environments—and love, however time-tested, is forever complicated.

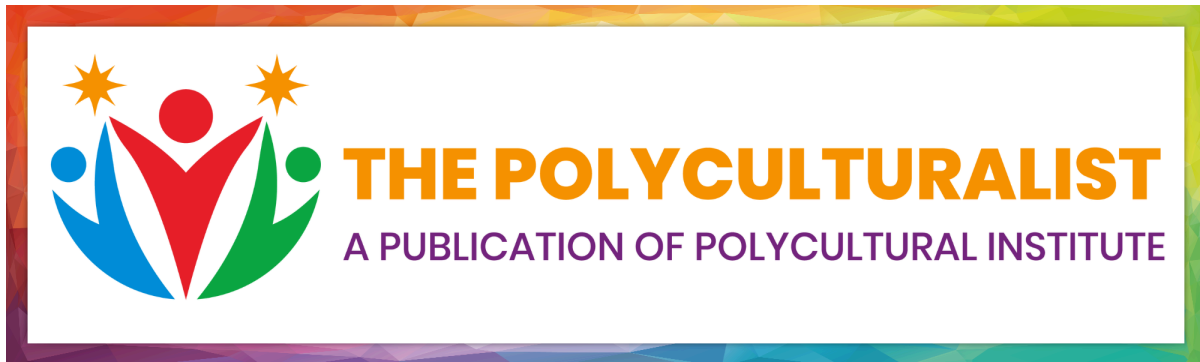


The Thank You Corner

Your generous feedback and encouragement have motivated us to reclaim our place on Chicago's stages. Your loving and supportive words mean a lot to us, and we want you to know that they have played an important role in affirming these decisions.

A heartfelt thank you for your support!

thank you
thank you
thank you



Our latest offering of *The Polyculturalist* features Sophia Walker, Archivist at Silk Road Rising and a Ph.D. Candidate in the East Asian Languages & Civilizations and Cinema & Media Studies joint degree program at The University of Chicago.

Embodying Polyculturalism with Sophia Walker

This interview was conducted on January 30, 2023, by Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala, Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council Coordinator.

Tasneem: In your role as the archivist for Silk Road Rising, what insights into polyculturalism have you gleaned from archiving the company's first twenty years?



Sophia: It's been incredible to be able to take this deep dive into the history of Silk Road Rising and to look at all the materials that are available to us from this history. I think what's been most amazing for me is to see how all of these various stories are connected. We have so many stories from every corner of the Silk Road, including from history and from the diaspora. The more I look at them and the more time I spend with them, the more connections I see. For example, I can see similarities between a contemporary family's diaspora story and a historical one. It's incredible to see the threads that connect all of them. Additionally, I've also had the opportunity to see working documents and interviews with people that never ended up being included in any kind of public materials, and I love seeing the stories that are behind the plays that were actually produced. I've found that it's all intertwined—that's been the biggest takeaway for me from this project.



Tasneem: As an American of mixed Japanese, Lebanese, and European ancestry, your familial and individual identities are complex and interconnected. How does polyculturalism inform your sense of self?

Sophia: I think polyculturalism has always been who I am and how I've lived my life. I only really stumbled across the word a couple of years ago, so the word itself is fairly new to me. But as somebody whose family's cultures come from the breadth of the Silk Road—the idea of existing simultaneously, of having cultures or ideas or pieces of oneself that people don't necessarily think of as being able to coexist having to coexist—that is so inherently who I am. There's also this temporal aspect where the various different branches of my family ended up in the US at different times, for different reasons, and have

gathered different experiences with them. It's a combination of not only the shorthand that we use —“Where our families are from”—but also a compilation of our experiences and the experiences of our ancestors and how we all ended up at this one place in time.



Much of the tourism material on Canada's Prince Edward Island -- home of *Anne of Green Gables* -- is in English, French, and Japanese.

Tasneem: How do polycultural ideas inform your doctoral work on Anglo-American imagery in Japanese popular/neo-Victorian culture?

Sophia: What I'm interested in is how texts, ideas, and stories travel. One example is *Alice in Wonderland*. It's huge in Japan; it's so, so popular. It's been taken apart and loved and become something entirely new. *Anne of Green Gables* is another example. What interests me is how texts and stories travel through space, culture, and time, and at what point do they become something new? When somebody in Japan in 2023 is reading *Alice in Wonderland*, what is going through their head that is making it live for them? I think that is inherently polycultural. When we consume a piece of media that isn't

even necessarily designed for us, what goes through our heads? What other cultural imageries are we drawing on? There's a sense of meshing, squishing together, mixing up that I think is so interesting.

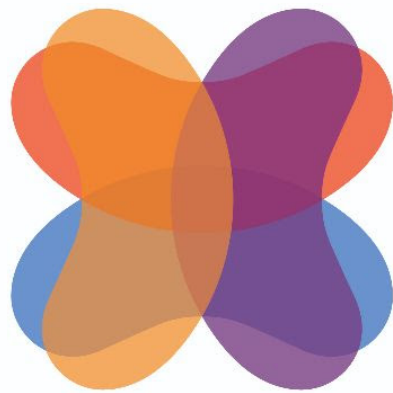


The Anne-themed lunch menu at the "Anne of Green Gables Atelier and Cafe" in Tokyo, Japan.

Tasneem: Please tell us a story of a time when someone surprised you because they supported you or demonstrated compassion towards you even though you expected otherwise.

Sophia: In this case, all the credit goes out to my advisors at The University of Chicago. When I was writing the proposal for this project, I was really nervous. It's a little bit of a weird and enormous project. There aren't any other students in my department who are working on anything quite like this. As I was writing, I was thinking through the pieces of media that I would be drawing on because, as we talked about, I'm interested in how you pull together these big pieces and ideas of historical lineage and time and space, and geography. It was very personal to me, even if it didn't come across that way. So I was very nervous when I presented my proposal, but I was extremely

encouraged. I was surprised by how supportive all three of them were of my work and how excited they were about my slightly strange ideas. I wanted to take seriously the pieces of media that I really loved as a little mixed kid in rural New England. I was gratified and really pleased and happy that these scholars whom I deeply respect were so excited about these ideas that I was having.



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Institute

Connecting People, Cultures, and Communities

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